

For Information Contact:

Lydia Sermons-Ward, 703-907-8640

press@psych.org

Hillarie Turner, 703-907-8536

hturner@psych.org

Embargoed until:

February 1, 2006, 12:01 a.m. ET

Release No. 06-06

New Treatment For Patients Struggling With Pathological Gambling

Arlington, Va. – Gambling urges and behavior were significantly reduced by nalmefene, a drug that blocks receptors in the brain, reports the February 2006 issue of the *American Journal of Psychiatry* (*AJP*), the official journal of the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

The four-month trial led by Jon E. Grant, M.D., J.D., in “Multicenter Investigation of the Opioid Antagonist Nalmefene in the Treatment of Pathological Gambling,” included 207 participants at 15 outpatient treatment centers. Three doses of nalmefene -- 25, 50, and 100 mg/day were compared with placebo. The proportion of patients who were rated as “much improved” or “very much improved” at their last evaluation was significantly higher in the group taking 25-mg/day of nalmefene (59 percent) than in the placebo group (34 percent).

Both the 25-mg/day and 50-mg/day groups demonstrated significant reductions in gambling urges, thoughts and behavior. The 25-mg group also had the lowest dropout rate of the three nalmefene groups; their rate was not significantly higher than that of the placebo group. All of the dropout rates were high, however, and liver function remained normal.

“The study is part of emerging evidence that gambling, once thought to be a problem in moral integrity, is instead a problem in brain biology and can be treated successfully,” said Robert Freedman, M.D., *AJP* editor-in-chief.

Pathological gambling is estimated to affect one percent of the population and can lead to family disruption, job loss, bankruptcy and incarceration. Various psychosocial treatments are in use, but few medications have been consistently superior to placebo for pathological gambling.

The findings add to the growing evidence for the involvement of brain neurochemicals in addictive behaviors, such as gambling. Nalmefene blocks opiate-like neurochemicals to reduce gambling. Another neurochemical, dopamine, increases gambling. Increased dopamine results from the treatment of Parkinson’s disease by L-dopa and other drugs. Some elderly Parkinson’s patients then become pathological gamblers for the first time in their lives.

The Food and Drug Administration has not yet approved the oral form of nalmefene for general clinical use. This study was supported by BioTie Therapies.

(*Am J Psychiatry*. 2006; 163: 303-312).

Note to Editors: Contact APA’s Office of Communications and Public Affairs at 703-907-8640 or press@psych.org for an embargoed copy of the article. Visit *AJP* at www.ajp.psychiatryonline.org.

Also in the February issue: “Pathological Gambling: Focusing on the Addiction, Not the Activity” editorial by Carol A. Tamminga, M.D. and Eric J. Nestler, PH.D., M.D.

About the American Psychiatric Association:

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 36,000 physician members specialize in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psych.org and www.healthyminds.org.